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ABSTRACT

Contrastive analysis can help solve certain problems in translation, for example, that of idioms. A contrastive analysis of source language (SL) and target language (TL) might have as its theoretical framework a contrastive lexical analysis based on generative semantics. In this approach both SL and TL idioms are broken down into their semantic components and compared. In the first stage of comparison, possible equivalents can be stated on the basis of shared semantic features. In the second stage, these equivalents are contrasted and their differences identified. These may involve differences in form, differences in meaning range, or deceptive cognates. The third step involves finding non-idiomatic TL lexical items that carry the information not covered by the TL idioms. (AM)

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Contrastive Analysis and the Translation of Idioms: Some Remarks on Contrasting Idioms

1.0 Applied Linguistics and Idioms

The various fields of research within the expanding science of linguistics can profit more from cooperation with aligned fields than from isolation. This fact can also be applied to the neighbouring branches of Applied Linguistics: the science of translation and Contrastive Analysis (CA). The purpose of this paper is not, to comment on this relationship which is best described as one of mutual complimentation but rather to show how problems in translation can be solved with the help of CA. This shall be demonstrated in a field which has the reputation of giving translators many a hard nut to crack: idioms.

2.0 The Translation of Idioms

Before we can discuss some aspects of the contrasting of idioms ands its relevance for translation, we should make clear how the term idiom is to be understood and how the translation process is seen in the present paper.

2.1 Idioms

Definitions of idiom vary so much in linguistics that one is sometimes inclined to question wether such a thing as an idiom exists at all (cf. Lipka 1972:81 who prefers to talk about idiomatic units). For the purposes of the present paper it seems sufficient to define an idiom as a fixed collocation whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of its constituent parts such as blind date, by and large, to kick the bucket, kingdom come, to eat one's heart out, (don't) carry coals to Newcastle etc.

2.2 Translation

Catford (1965:2o) defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)." This definition refers to equivalence, the basic principle, and the text, the basic unit of translation (cf. Hönig 1976:5o).

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One might object, however, that this is not sufficient to allow for a special treatment of all idioms, since

- not all idioms have literal counterparts (e.g. by and large, kingdom come, trip the light fantastic,
- lexical ambiguity is by no means restricted to idioms,
- most instances of lexical ambiguity are dissolved in context.

An example for the way the context facilitates the recognizing of idioms is given in Nida (1958:13): in the doghouse is likely to be interpreted as an idiom in the sentence

(1) He is in the doghouse

if he refers to a man and not to a dog. This presupposes, however, besides a particular cultural background, the knowledge that to be in the doghouse is an idiom in English and that the user knows its idiomatic meaning.

Another argument in favour of special treatment of idioms is, that they are frequently untranslatable (Filipec 1973:86). Indeed there are few idioms that correspond in form and meaning totally to idioms in another language.

Again, one might argue, that this applies to many non-idiomatic lexical items as well. In that case the problem is solved by making not the word but the text the basic unit of translation. According to Nida (1974:19o)

> it is quite unnecessary that what is one word in the source language be translated by a single word in the receptor language. The semantic load of such a word can readily be distributed over a phrase. Similarlay, what may be a phrase in the source language can often be communicated in the receptor language by a single word.

This principle is illustrated by comparing words to a string of freight cars.

> Many cars have a number of different loads, but some cars are linked together to carry single loads. Similarly, some words contain a series of concepts and others link together in phrases to specify closely integrated concepts. What is important in the hauling is not what goods are loaded onto what waggon nor a particular order in which the waggons are connected to one another but that all the content get to their destination. The same is true in translation (ibid.).

What is least difficult in translation - to continue in Nida's image - is to load the freight of a SL-car onto a single TL-car. It would be more work to distribute it on several other cars. By

far the most complicated way of handling freight, however, is the unloading of a group of cars linked together and redistributing their loads. The latter is exactly what we are doing in the translation of idioms. While the meaning of non-idiomatic lexical items can in most cases be expressed quite easily by other lexica or grammatical means in TL, the translation of an idiom is much more complicated.

Idioms are highly culture-specific. The complex meaning they contribute to a text on a denotative, connotative, and pragmatic level can at best be rendered by a TL idiom that carries approximately the same meaning in the cultural framework of TL. To find such an idiom is not an easy task, since in the case of idioms "we cannot assume that all languages have the same type" (Nida 1959:13).

3.0 The Contrastive Analysis of Idioms

A contrastive analysis of SL and TL idioms could provide some insights and information that might be quite helpful to the translator. How should such a CA be organized, what should be its main objectives, what should it concentrate on, what kind of results can it achieve?

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of such a CA could principally be that of a contrastive lexical analysis (cf. Roos 1975 a+b, 1976). There is no need to discuss this approach here in detail. Suffice it to state a few of its principlesthat are relevant for contrasting idioms.

The overall framework is that of contrastive generative semantics similar to the approaches presented in Krzeszowski (1974) and Lipinska (1975) where universals in the form of semantic features function as tertium compatationis. If the practical issue is the translation of English idioms into German a CA designed for that purpose should brake down English idioms into their semantic components, analyse their internal structure, their presuppositions, connotations, and collocations and finally their stylistic value and pragmatic function. The same should be done for German

idioms. In the first stage of comparison, possible equivalents can be stated on the grounds of their sharing most of their semantic features. In the next step, these equivalents are contrasted and their differences stated. In the third step one should look for non-idiomatic German lexical items that could carry the information not covered by German idioms.
By this procedure one will arrive at a detailed description of English idioms and their German translation equivalence.

3.2 Types of Equivalent Forms

A CA of idioms should be concerned with the different types of equivalent forms - which can be idioms, single words, or non-idiomatic formulas - and the types of difference that can be recognized in equivalent idioms. Eckert (1973:1oo) distinguishes two main types of equivalence in idioms:

1. solche denen feste Entsprechungen in der Zielsprache zugeordnet werden und
2. solche bei denen wir ihnen ein bestimmtes Wort oder einen bestimmten Ausdruck zuordnen wollen.

In the following, these two types shall be discussed more in detail.
If we include in the first group all cases where an English idiom has s German idiom as its equivalent, we must distinguish at least two subgroups:

- idioms that express the same meaning by means of lexical material that covers the same denotations in both language and
- idioms that are equivalent in meaning but that arrive at it by different lexical material.

3.2.1 English Idioms Matched by German Idioms

The relationship holding between pairs of English and German idioms can be one of equivalence or - in case of additional formal correspondence - of congruence. These terms apply to the latter and the former of the obove mentioned subgroups respectively.

3.2.1.1 Congruence

The first of the two subgroups owes its existance to the fact that there is something like a common pool of expressions shared by

most European languages due to their common source of culture and traditions. An example given in Eckert (1973:1oo) is the German idiom die erste Geige spielen, that has, as he shows, a direct equivalent in Russian. The English idiom to play the firs fiddle stands in a relationship of complete congruence to its German counterpart. In this case the translation process is a very direct one,"der Übergang von einem Sprachsystem zum andren erfolgt unmittelbar"(ibid.).

The following sentences contain pairs of congruent idioms being not only semantically equivalent but show completely parallel constructions:

(2a) Linda is an old flame of mine
(2b) Linda ist eine alte Flamme von mir

(3a) Miss Marple pokes her nose into other people's affairs
(3b) Miss Marple steckt ihre Nase in andrer Leute Angelegenheiten.

3.2.1.2 Equivalence

There is a large number of culture-specific idioms in English and German - mainly frozen metaphors - that convey basically the same messages but by entirely different lexical means. According to Nida (1958:1o)"cultures possess the very same traits, but identify and describe them in utterly diverse ways." The idioms in this soubgroup are characterized by a gradience reaching from rather similar expressions in SL and TL to a completely differen way of expressing the same idea.

The idioms in (4) differ only in the motion indicated by the verb

(4a) Micky was doing all the work while Goofy didn't lift a finger

(4b) Micky tat die ganze Arbeit, während Goofy keinen Finger krumm machte

On the other end of the scale there are different forms as to read the riot act and jdm. die Leviten lesen.

3.2.2 Idioms Matched by Other Lexemes

So far, we have been concerned with English idioms that have an idiomatic translation equivalent in German. In some cases, however, no equivalent German idiom can be found. In order to show

how this problem can be handled, we should come back to something that has already been said above: Languages can arrange their linguistic material in different ways or, as Bańczerowski(1975:51 puts it,"the same or at least strongly similar denotative effects can be achieved in different ways."This principle of different "determination channels"(Bańczerowski) accounts for the fact that most - or even all - languages can arrange meaning in synthetic or analytic expressions (cf.Bańczerowski 1973:22f.). What is a synthetic expression in one language - e.g. an idiom - might as well be expressed analytically - as a single lexical item - in another language. Just the same, it can be expressed by a formula or by an entirely free expression.

3.2.2.1 Single Word

Due to the different determination channels the German equivalent of an English idiom may in some instances be a single lexical item. This is the case with by the way / übrigens and by heart / auswendig. The English idiom to split hairs is matched in German by the nominal form Haarspalterei as in

(5a) Can't you stop splitting hairs?

(5b) Kannst du nicht endlich mit der Haarspalterei aufhören?

As the example shows, one has to make the necessary syntactic adjustments if one renders the English idiom in this way.

3.2.2.2 Formula

There are other instances where the best way of expressing the meaning of an English idiom would be by a German fixed non-idiomatic syntactic group. This type of formula (Fillmore) can be exemplified by to sit on the fence which even allows for the choice between two formulaic expressions: mit der Sache nichts zu tun haben wollen and sich (aus der Sache) heraushalten, the latter being frequentla used elliptically.

3.2.2.3 Free Form

In the case of to shoot the moon one will look in vain for a German equivalent. The only way to express the content of this idiom in German is to use a free expression. This is illustrated by (6):

(6a) The landlady had demanded the rent in advance for fear the student might shoot the moon

(6b) Die Wirtin hatte die Miete im voraus verlangt, aus Angst der Student könnte heimlich ausziehen ohne die Miete zu zahlen

In this case the German translation sounds much like a definitior of the English idiom. The same applies to blind date which is a culture specific idiom. The institution of having blind dates is hardly known in the German-speaking world, so the only way to render blind date in German would be in terms of a definition.

3.3 Differences in Equivalent Idioms

There are various ways in which English and German idioms can differ. The main differences which should be worked out by a CA are such of form, meaning - both, denotative and connotative - , stylistic value and pragmatic function. The limits of the present paper do not allow for a detailed discussion of all these aspects The type of difficulty encountered by the translator shall only be exemplified by a brief discussion of differences in form and meaning range and by the problems resulting from their combinatic in deceptive cognates.

3.3.1 Difference in Form

Even in congruent idioms at least some concessions have to be made either with respect to the particular grammatical systems of the two languages involved or the idiosyncrasies of the idioms themselves. The former is the case in to burn one's fingers / sich die Finger verbrennen where the different use of the definit article in German vs. the possessive pronoun in English accounts for a slight formal difference in the two idioms. The latter applies to the formal difference of to take heart and sich ein Herz fassen.

The German idiom keine schlafenden Hunde wecken and its English equivalent let sleeping dogs lie differ in expressing the same content in a negative and a positive way respectively.

The idioms to buy a pig in a poke and die Katze im Sack kaufen differ in still another way: The same type of situation is evoked with a slight variation of the image.

There are countless other ways in which near-congruent idioms can

differ. For our purposes it may suffice to mention a few of them and to move on towards the other end of the scale where one encounters pairs of idioms that at first sight have nothing at all in common but that express exactly the same content.
This can be exemplified by the pair to put one's foot in one's mouth / ins Fettnäpfchen treten. The situation referred to by the idioms is characterized by the same type of reaction it would provoke in the two cultural communties: that of committing a blunder. The meaning expressed in (7) is therefore the same:

(7a) You shouldn't have asked Marlene Dietrich her age. Why must you always put your foot in your mouth?

(7b) Du hättest Marlene Dietrich nicht nach ihrem Alter fragen dürfen. Warum mußt du immer ins Fettnäpfchen treten?

What the idioms in (7) have in common is the fact that they belong to the same class of metaphorical idioms (cf.Makkai 1972). The idioms in the following example differ even in that respect:

(8a) Two days after his escape from Dartmoor prison the convict was still at large

(8b) Zwei Tage nach dem Ausbruch aus dem Gefängnis von Dartmoor war der Verbrecher immer noch auf freiem Fuß

In this context it is important to call attention to a difference of expression not on the content but on the form side where the form in one language is more specific than that in the other. Further examples are given in (9) and (1o).

(9a) The name of the girl is on the tip of my tongue but I can't recall it

(9b) Der Name dieses Mädchens liegt/schwebt mir auf der Zunge, aber ich komme nicht darauf

(1oa) The co-pilot kept his head during the hijacking

(1ob) Der Copilot behielt während der Flugzeugentführung einen kühlen Kopf

In (9) the form of the English idiom is more specific than that of its German counterpart; the opposite holds for (1o). While in (9) German Zunge is opposed by English tip of the tongue, in (1o) English head is matched by kühler Kopf.
In (11) the difference lies not in one additional word of determining function as in the preceding examples but there are several additional words in the German form.

(11a) The day before Christmas mother usually has her hands full

(11b) Am Tag vor Weihnachten hat Mutter gewöhnlich alle Hände voll zu tun

3.3.2 Difference in Meaning Range

Up to this point we have only been concerned with the question in which ways English and German idioms express the same meaning. We should, however, be aware of the fact that the situation is in reality much more complex than could be stated. If there is an idiom in German that can pass as an equivalent of a given English idiom we cannot tacitly imply that it has exactly the same meaning range.

A particularly interesting case of a pair of idioms that differ in meaning range is that of spin a yarn and Seemannsgarn spinnen. Ther German term is restricted to sailors while the English idiom is not restricted in such a way. To make up for this limited application, German two alternatives allowing for two additional groups of storytellers: hunters and fishermen (Jägerlatein erzählen; Anglerlatein erzählen).

Another aspect of the problem of varying meaning ranges is demonstrated in (12):

(12a) The supermarket is just around the corner

(12b) Der Supermarkt ist gerade um die Ecke

The English idiom just around the corner which is matched by an exactly congruent German form can also be used in sentences like

(13a) Christmas is just around the corner

As (13b) shows, the equivalent German idiom cannot be used in this way:

(13b) *Weihnachten ist gerade um die Ecke

The equivalent German version of (13a) would rather be

(13c) Weihnachten steht kurz vor der Tür

The meaning range covered by a single idiom in English is covered in this instance by two different idioms in German.

3.3.3 Deceptive Cognates

Equivalence on the content-side and difference on the expression-side is not the only kind of relationship we encounter in the CA of idioms. The opposite is also possible. Formal correspondenc but difference in meaning can be a considerable source of confusion.

One might be tempted, for example, to regard the German idiom

aus der Haut fahren as an equivalent of jump out of one's skin which is not the case. The German form that looks so similar is an equivalent of to fly off the handle which means something entirely different.

The correspondence that makes deceptive cognates a permanent source of confusion not only tends to mislead interpretors and translators: its influence can be traced in numerous instances of bilingual dictionary entries. What Klein (1972) has shown for French and German dictionaries applies to some degree also to dictionaries of English and German:

> Bei Formengleichheit von Idiomatismen ist also in jedem Falle sorgfältig zu prüfen, ob auch die Bedeutung gleich ist, und gerade hier fehlt es den Wörterbuchverfassern gelegentlich an der nötigen Sprachkenntnis oder an der nötigen Sorgfalt (45)

The translator, therefore, can not always rely on the information given in bilingual dictionaries.

4.0 Conclusion

The contrastive analysis of idioms becomes even more complicated if we take additional factors into account. Even in cases of congruence there is a high probability that the idioms involved differ in connotational meaning. In addition, they will probably have different stylistic values. If there might be a rare case of coincidence in all these aspects, there can still be a difference in pragmatic function. As has been stated above, a detailed discussion of all these aspects is not possible within the limits of this paper.

The question of possible German equivalents of English idioms and their relationship in form and meaning have been discussed more in detail since it would be central to a CA. By contrasting English idioms and their German equivalents in the way suggested above it should be possible to work out all similarities and differences relevant in the process of translation. The results of such a CA should be stated in such a form that make them readily accessable to the translator.

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